

PROOF THAT STUP



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HT-18

It was supposed to be a fairly normal weekend. I loaded my motorcycle in the back of my truck Friday after work and headed from NAS Whiting Field in Milton, Fla., to Denham Springs, La. I was going home to see my dad and some friends.

I didn't plan to do a lot of riding over the weekend, so I didn't take all the required protective gear I usually ride with. Instead, I took only my helmet and gloves, and, as it turned out, I didn't even wear the latter—stupid me!

The main reason I was taking my bike home was to show it to some friends who never had seen it. I also was going to have my dad look at the motorcycle's frame and make a threaded stud for the left side fairings that had been broken a month earlier when I had had to lay down the bike. Luckily, I had been wearing all my protective gear on that occasion and was able to ride away with only

a sore ankle. Other than that broken stud and some scratches, my bike was OK, too. That incident happened while I was on my way to pick up a new helmet I had ordered.

When I awoke Saturday at home, it was a beautiful morning. I was supposed to help my dad change the fuel pump on his truck, but I decided to go for a quick ride beforehand. I unloaded my bike and started it up. While waiting for it to get warm, I went inside to grab my helmet and to tell my dad I would be back in a few minutes. I was dressed in the same clothes I had worn the night before, along with a pair of sneakers that I had left at my dad's house.

I walked outside, strapping on my helmet, but I had forgotten the gloves in my backpack. I climbed on the bike and had gone about a mile down the road before I turned around and headed back to

DAD HURTS

Dad's house. Feeling like I wanted to add a little to my morning ride, I opened the throttle a little and downshifted a gear from high to let the power of the bike pop up the front wheel about a foot. I remember my bike was turning about 8,000 rpm when I downshifted, and the 599-cc engine put the bike and me perpendicular to the road beneath. All I could think of was, "I'm about to wreck, and I'm going to be all over the road without my leathers."

I remember coming off the back of my bike and my left buttocks hitting the ground first. Then, somehow, I was thrown up onto my feet before being thrown down onto the face of my helmet. Both my hands and my left elbow hit the ground about the same time my helmet did. My knees also made contact about the same time. When I stopped sliding and rolling, my stomach, back, shoulders, right elbow, back of my right hand, and my knees all hurt. I also noticed a small cut on the outside edge of my left foot, as well as road rash and bruises on one heel and two toes.

I assume that, when I was coming off the bike, I pulled even harder on the throttle, causing the bike to keep coming over. I had to have been going faster than 40 mph (the last speed I remember) when I came off the bike because it went another 100 feet.

I got up off the ground and started walking toward my dad's house, thinking, "Man, my butt hurts!" It was then I noticed dirt and debris scattered on the road. I was walking with a limp—not from pain but because I was missing my left shoe. Somewhere in my scan of things, I saw a mailbox on the ground that I knew used to be on a wooden post on the left side of the road. About 20 feet later, I saw my bike in the ditch on the left side of the road—in front of my best friend's house. All I could tell at that moment was that the front end of my bike was jacked up. It looked like it had a set of chopper forks.

As I neared Dad's house, he was standing in the road. I could tell he was crying when he said, "Oh my God! I told you to be careful."

I responded, "I'm OK," even though he could tell I wasn't. I pulled off my helmet and put it in the back of my truck, then looked down to see there wasn't much left of my shirt. My hands were chewed up and covered in blood, and my chest and stomach looked like someone had come after me with a sander and filet knife. All I wanted to do was to wash off some of the blood, dirt and asphalt.





Once in the house, I took off what was left of my clothes and turned on the shower. Dad had followed me into the bathroom to make sure I was OK. While he was talking to me, I banged my head against the wall several times, saying, “Stupid, stupid, stupid!” in an effort to divert some of my pain. Whatever shock my body was in from the wreck immediately disappeared when the shower water hit my raw flesh. I began to scream like a baby as the pain rushed over my body, but I endured it long enough to remove most of the dirt and asphalt.

When I got out of the shower, I yelled for a towel and tried to dry my bloody body. I then wrapped the towel around my waist and walked outside to find my dad and about a dozen people, including my best friend’s mom, who had stopped by to see what had happened.

I decided I needed to go to the emergency room, so my best friend said he would drive me. I didn’t argue with him. After putting on a different pair of pants and slipping on some sandals, I gave my friend the keys to my truck. En route to the emergency room, I kept trying to adjust the thermostat to accommodate my raw body. I never had felt pain this bad.

Nurses at the E.R. asked what I needed when I walked in, but they knew the answer as soon as I removed the towel that was covering my wounds. They took me back to a room, where I told them what had happened. Then, they all left for what seemed like hours but was only minutes.

I got a couple of shots to ease the pain, then lay there with a sheet over my lap as this medic, who used to be a Marine, cleaned my road rash. The drugs and his conversation helped a lot. Afterward, the medic covered all the raw areas with a silver

ointment used on burns to prevent infection. I then got into a wheelchair, and the medic rolled me out, covered in gauze (like a mummy) and wearing two gowns.

My friend drove me to the nearest pharmacy to get my prescriptions filled—I hardly could wait to get one of the painkillers—then we headed home. I went straight to bed without saying a word to anyone. When I woke up, I called my LPO and told him what had happened. He said he was glad I had called and still was alive and told me to check in with medical the first thing Monday morning when I got back.

I spent the rest of Saturday and Sunday taking pain pills, getting re-banded by my dad, and sleeping. The doctor had said showers would be good for the wounds but acknowledged they also would bring the most pain. Accordingly, I relied on baths all weekend. Sunday, I gave up the pain pills several hours before leaving to drive back to Milton. My friend offered to drive me, but I figured if I could sit in a truck for three-and-a-half hours, I might as well drive. With hindsight being 20/20, I now realize I probably should have accepted my friend’s offer.

Once in Milton, I went to medical to see a flight surgeon and find out what they would do with me now that I was broken. Doc looked at everything and said it looked bad, but it wasn’t infected, so that was good news. He decided I should come in twice a day for dressing changes, which was OK because I lived in the barracks. With a re-supply of my prescriptions, I headed back to the treatment area, where I went twice a day for the next three weeks. That first day was a learning experience for the corpsman—the one who would help me each day. I had to tell him how to wrap me. I let him





know it would hurt, no matter how careful he was with the ointment and gauze.

I was SIQ for two weeks before I could stand the pain enough to walk around. When I went back to work, I immediately got a new call sign—"Skid Mark"—quite fitting, I must say.

I ended up getting X-rays of my ankle, which showed I just had a bruised heel. This injury limited me to six-hour workdays, which helped me heal and get an "up chit" sooner. Everyone at work, including me, was pleased when my "up chit" came. After nearly a month, I was ready to fly again and to get re-qualified, so I could help everyone.

I still have some minor pain in my heel and wrists, and I'm waiting on the skin to heal completely on my hands, arms and knees. If I had been wearing all my protective gear, most of these injuries would have been avoided, but it still would stink, knowing I wrecked a motorcycle [see accompanying photos] for which I paid \$5,500.

My fondest wish is that someone will learn something from my mistakes. When you get on a motorcycle, don't be satisfied with just meeting

the Navy's minimal requirements. A standard shirt won't last more than a few feet on asphalt—unless it's made of Kevlar—and a pair of blue jeans won't last much longer than the shirt. You also probably won't escape injuries to your feet unless you're wearing a good pair of motorcycle-riding boots.

If you think good riding gear is too expensive, compare the costs of replacing your head, a few major appendages, or some skin. If you can't afford the correct gear, maybe you shouldn't be riding.

While I was SIQ for two weeks, I had nothing better to do than to read those magazines I had bought when my motorcycle was in one piece and I was able to ride. I read one article about two professional superbike riders who had had high-speed crashes during testing at Daytona International Speedway. One of them had a back tire blow out at 186 mph. He high-sided his bike and hit the tarmac, then slid into the wall. Injuries included holes in his arms and rear, as well as some major scrapes on his back. He spent two-and-a-half weeks in a hospital, where he was cleaned and had skin grafts done.

The other rider was a little luckier. His "slide for life" came at a mere 172 mph. He didn't require two-and-a-half weeks in a hospital, but he did have temporary memory loss. A picture with the magazine article showed this rider standing with his leathers from the crash, showing holes on the backside and some on the elbows and other spots.

These stories prove your odds of surviving a crash are better when you wear the proper protective gear. Think about that fact the next time you jump on your bike, dressed only in minimum protective gear. ■

In an 11/23/04 phone conversation with the 23-year-old author, I learned that he just recently had been in another motorcycle crash. This time, a motorist with no insurance blew through a stop sign and broadsided him, breaking his left hand and both bones in his left ankle. His left wrist was dislocated, and doctors also found some torn ligaments in it. Meanwhile, the motorist who hit the author is finding "alternate" transportation, courtesy of the police, who revoked his license. When asked if he plans to get back on his motorcycle once his injuries heal, Petty Officer Dugan said, "I will when I get my bike rebuilt again."—Ed.